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Fat-busting needle fad too risky, say doctors

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March 23, 2008

SOME Australian cosmetic doctors are injecting clients with a medically untested fat-busting substance to melt away love handles, thunder thighs and man boobs — a procedure that is facing bans overseas and has been linked to serious health complications.

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As one of the fastest growing cosmetic procedures, the Lipodissolve body-sculpting therapy, seen as a non-surgical alternative to liposuction, has alarmed doctors who warn that the technique has not been approved by regulators or properly tested for safety.

A legal loophole in Australia permits use of the soy bean extract therapy, despite Brazil having banned it, some American states wanting to ban it, Britain blocking advertising of the therapy and Canadian doctors being told to stop using it.

Germany is the only country where use of Lipodissolve is authorised, but it is strictly administered for the prevention of fat embolism in blood vessels and its manufacturer has specifically warned against it being injected subcutaneously.

The Australian loophole allows importation of Lipodissolve without the approval of the nation's drug regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration, although the TGA is moving to rectify this. An international register of doctors trained to administer Lipodissolve includes 95 in Australia.

"It is being injected into people without having been clinically studied — there are no clinical trials," said Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons president Howard Webster.

"There appears to be no regulatory will to ensure the safety of the citizens of this country."

Phosphatidycholine, prescribed in Australia as Lipodissolve, is also known as Lipostabil, Lipomelt or Flabjab. The treatment involves fine needles injecting the substance into specific body parts to dissolve fat cells over two or three months.

Cosmetic Physicians Society of Australasia president Dr Mary Dingley said side effects included severe swelling that could last up to two weeks.

"If someone had it done for a bit of a double chin, they're going to be looking like a bullfrog," she said.

Other reactions included ulceration and scarring, but these were uncommon and the therapy did appear to work for some people, she said.

Promoters say Lipodissolve — which is relatively new to Australia — has been used safely on hundreds of thousands of people overseas, taking an average of 4.2 centimetres off love handles, 6.2 centimetres off lower bellies and three centimetres off thighs.

Melbourne beauty clinics charge up to \$800 for treating abdomens and backs and between \$400 and \$700 for outer thighs. Two to three treatments are usually needed.

Last year, the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery gained approval from the influential US Food and Drug Agency for a clinical trial of Lipodissolve. It found numerous reports of bacterial infection, chronically inflamed tissue and necrosis linked to the technique.

In February, a British woman said she had been left permanently disfigured by the therapy.

One of the biggest providers in the US, Fig Inc., this month filed for bankruptcy after clients asked for refunds totalling \$US4.3 million (\$A4.8 million).

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